THE WORLD.

NUMBER XIX.

By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

THURSDAY, *May* the 10th, 1753.

To Mr. FITZ-ADAM.

SIR,

THE preſent age is over-run with romances, and yet ſo ſtrong does the appetite for them continue, that as Otway ſays on a leſs delicate occaſion,

——*every rank fool goes down.*

I AM not ſurpriſed that any ſketch of human nature, howſoever imperfect, ſhould attract the attention of the generality of readers. We are eaſily delighted with pictures of ourſelves, and are ſometimes apt to fancy a ſtrong likeneſs where there is not even the leaſt reſemblance. Thoſe great maſters of every movement of the human mind, Homer and Shakeſpear, knew well this propenſity of our diſpoſitions. The latter, from the nature of his writings,

writings, had more frequent opportunities of opening the moſt minute avenues to the heart. The former, though his province was more confined, has let no occaſion paſs of exerting this affecting talent. He has not only contraſted a vaſt variety of characters, and given all the paſſions their full play, but even in the ſtiller parts of his work, the ſimilies and deſcriptions, every thing is full of human life. It is the Carian woman who ſtains the ivory; if a torrent deſcends from the mountains, ſome cottager trembles at the ſound of it; and the fine broken landſkip of rocks and woods by moon-light, has a ſhepherd to gaze at and admire it.

But it is not with ſuch painters as theſe that I am at preſent concerned. They drew really from nature; and ages have felt, and applauded the truth of their deſigns. Whereas our modern artiſts (if we may gueſs from the motley repreſentations they give us of our ſpecies) are ſo far from having ſtudied the natures of other people, that they ſeldom ſeem to have the leaſt acquaintance with themſelves.

The writers of heroic romance, or the loves of Philodoxus and Urania, profeſſedly ſoar *above nature*. They introduce into their deſcriptions trees, water, air, &c. like common mortals; but then all their rivers are clearer than chryſtal, and every breeze is impregnated with the ſpices of Arabia. The manners of their perſonages ſeem full as extraordinary to our groſs ideas. We are apt to ſuſpect the virtue of two young people who are rapturouſly in love with each other, and who travel whole years in one another's company; though we are expreſſly told, that at the cloſe of every evening, when they retire to reſt, the hero leans his head againſt a knotted oak, whilſt the heroine ſeeks the friendly ſhelter

ter of a diſtant myrtle. This, I ſay, ſeems to us a little unnatural; however, it is not of dangerous example. There can no harm follow if unexperienced perſons ſhould endeavour to imitate what may be thought inimitable. Should our virgins arrive but half way towards the chaſtity of a Parthenia, it will be ſomething gained; and we, who have had learned educations, know the power of early prejudices; ſome of us having emulated the public ſpirit, and other obſolete virtues of the old Grecians and Romans to the age of fifteen or ſixteen, ſome of us later, even to twenty or one and twenty.

But peace be to the manes of ſuch authors. They have long enjoyed that elyſium which they ſo frequently deſcribed on earth. The preſent race of romance-writers run univerſally into a different extreme. They ſpend the little art they are maſters of in weaving into intricacies the more familiar and more comical adventures of a Jack Slap, or a Betty Sallet; theſe, though they endeavour to copy after a very great original, I chuſe to call our writers *below nature*; becauſe very few of them have as yet found out their maſter's peculiar art of writing upon low ſubjects without writing in a low manner. Romances, judiciouſly conducted, are a very pleaſing way of conveying inſtruction to all parts of life. But to dwell eternally upon orphan-beggars, and *ſerving-men of low degree*, is certainly what I have called it, writing *below nature*; and is ſo far from conveying inſtruction, that it does not even afford amuſement.

The writers *below nature* have one advantage in common with the writers above it, that the originals they would ſeem to draw from are no where to be found. The heroes and heroines of the former are undoubtedly children of the imagination; and thoſe of the latter, if they

they are not all of them incapable of *reading* their own adventures, are at leaſt unable to inform us by *writing* whether the repreſentations of them are juſt, and whether people in their ſtation did ever think or act in the manner they are deſcribed to have done. Yet the authors, even in this particular, are not quite ſo ſecure as they may imagine; for when, towards the end of the third or fourth volume, the He or She of the piece (as is uſually the cuſtom) emerges into what they call genteel life, the whole cheat is frequently diſcovered. From ſeeing their total ignorance of what they are then deſcribing, we on good grounds conclude that they were equally unacquainted with the inferior parts of life, though we are not able to detect the falſhood. Bath, one ſhould imagine, the eaſieſt place in the world to get a thorough knowledge of; and yet I have obſerved, in books of this kind, ſeveral repreſentations of it ſo exceſſively erroneous, that they not only ſhewed the authors to be intirely ignorant of the manners of living there, but of the geography of the town.

But it is not the ignorance of theſe writers which I would principally complain of; though of that, as a Cenſor, you ought to take notice, and ſhould aſſure our young men and young women that they may read fifty volumes of this ſort of traſh, and yet, according to the phraſe which is perpetually in their mouths, *know nothing of life*. The thing I chiefly find fault with is their extreme indecency. There are certain vices which the vulgar call Fun, and the people of faſhion Gallantry; but the middle rank, and thoſe of the gentry who continue to go to church, ſtill ſtigmatize them by the opprobious names of fornication and adultery. Theſe are confeſſed to be in ſome meaſure detrimental to ſociety,

even

even by thoſe who practice them moſt; at leaſt, they are allowed to be ſo in all but themſelves. This being the caſe, why ſhould our novel-writers take ſo much pains to ſpread theſe enormities? It is not enough to ſay in excuſe that they write nonſenſe upon theſe ſubjects as well as others; for nonſenſe itſelf is dangerous here. The moſt abſurd ballads in the ſtreets, without the leaſt glimmering of meaning, recommend themſelves every day both to the great and ſmall vulgar only by obſcene expreſſions. Here therefore, Mr. Fitz-Adam, you ſhould interpoſe your authority, and forbid your readers (whom I will ſuppoſe to be all perſons who can read) even to attempt to open any novel, or romance, unlicenſed by you; unleſs it ſhould happen to be ſtamped FIELDING, *&c.*

YOUR power ſhould extend likewiſe to that inundation of obſcenity which is daily pouring in from France; and which has too frequently the wit and humour of a Crebillon to ſupport it. The gentlemen, who never read any thing elſe, will I know be at a loſs for amuſement, and feel their half-hour of morning hang rather too heavy on their hands. But ſurely, Mr. Fitz-Adam, when they conſider the good of their country (and all of them have that at heart) they will conſent to meet a little ſooner at the hazard table, or while away the tedious interval in ſtudying new chances upon the cards.

IF it be ſaid that the heroic romances which I have recommended for their virtue, are themſelves too full of paſſionate breathings upon ſome occaſions, I allow the charge; but am of opinion that theſe can do little more harm to the minds of young ladies than certain books of devotion, which are put into their hands by aunts and grandmothers; the writers of which, from having